

Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

DECEMBER 2016
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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

On the evening of the full moon in this Tamil month of *Aippasi*, the Ashram performed *annabhishekam* in Bhagavan's and Mother's Shrines as 2,000 pilgrims received Bhagavan's prasada at the Ashram front gate. November ended with chanting of *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* at Akhilandamma's Ashram (*Ramananda Matalayam*) in Desur on the 26th and 27th of the month. And with light showers at the end of November, there is rekindled hope that this year's monsoon may yet bring rain.

In the current issue of *Saranagati*, we hear about guidelines Bhagavan gave over the years regarding diet and health (see page 3). And the Girivalam Path tree crisis has been solved with an interim order given on 8th November that prevents further felling of trees on the hillround road (see details on page 8).

For videos, photos and further news of events, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org> or write to us at saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team

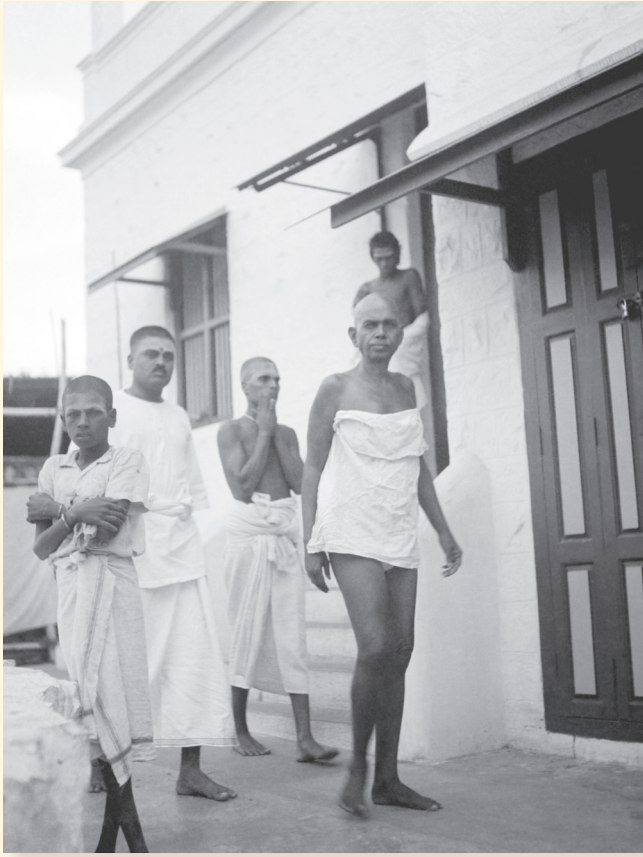
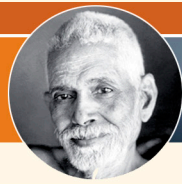
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Calendar of Upcoming Events

3rd December (Sat) Flag-raising to commence Kartigai Festival
12th December (Mon) Kartigai Deepam
13th December (Tues) Full Moon
16th December (Fri) Punarvasu Day
22nd December (Thurs) Last Night of the Hilltop Flame
31st December (Sat) Lucy Cornelssen Day

11th January (Weds) Full Moon
12th January (Thurs) Bhagavan's 137th Jayanthi
31st January (Tues) Swami Rajeswarananda Day
9th February (Thurs) Punarvasu Day
10th February (Fri) Full Moon
8th March (Weds) Punarvasu Day





Daily Life in the Dining Hall (pt. III) Bhagavan's Guidelines for Diet & Health

Introduction

Unless asked, Bhagavan rarely directed the lives of devotees. He never gave lists of rules or do's and don'ts but left it to them to find their own way. Likewise, he never offered devotees a set of rules for diet and in general was very accepting of their eating habits, even if some of their habits were, in his view, not ideally suited to them. When asked, Bhagavan advocated avoiding excessiveness regarding the intake of food. Overeating and indulging taste, he felt, only enhanced desire—*one cannot put out a burning fire by pouring petrol over it*¹, he once said. But fasting can have similar effects if done in excess, he argued, leaving the mind hankering obsessively after food. Bhagavan said that extreme fasting enervates the body and weakens “the mind too [leaving one] without sufficient strength for the spiritual quest. Therefore,

1 *Conscious Immortality*, Paul Brunton, 2012, p. 225.

he advised his listeners to “eat in moderation.”²

Food affects the mind, Bhagavan tells us, as “there is a subtle essence in all food, and, whereas sattvic foods promote meditation, “rajasic and tamasic foods hinder it.”³ The experience of true sadhaks, he says, “is to eat only to appease hunger and not to satisfy taste or craving. This will in due course lead to the control of the senses. Then continued and concentrated meditation will result in the annihilation of desires.”⁴

While Bhagavan cautioned against eating ‘for taste’ or eating food for its own sake, it should be added that Bhagavan, a master in the culinary arts, strived on a daily basis to see to it that the Ashram kitchen blended the right amount of herbs to make the Ashram meals as palatable and flavourful as possible. This paradox is only an apparent one. Bhagavan’s admonition against indulging taste is directed towards overeating or habitual eating beyond the body’s requirements. This should not be confused with Bhagavan’s endorsement of basic ayurvedic principles that link taste (*rasa*) to *agni* and the digestive enzymes necessary for the breakdown and proper assimilation of food. In other words, zesty flavourful food according to Bhagavan and Ayurveda stimulates the digestion necessary for bodily health. Bhagavan’s aim in cooking the Ashram food so as to achieve a robust savour mirrors the Gita where it says: *food which promotes longevity, vitality, energy, health, happiness and delight and which is delicious, nourishing and agreeable is the right food.*

The Vegetarian Diet

Of course, Bhagavan never disciplined or supervised devotees in their eating. But when asked his opinion, he gave clear guidelines. Among them, one of the clearest messages he ever gave was on the subject of vegetarianism. As Arthur Osbourne once pointed out, Bhagavan never urged anyone to practice celibacy but extolled the householder’s life, saying that married persons could also attain Realization. And when he was asked about postures for sitting meditation, Bhagavan responded simply, “one-pointedness of mind is the only good posture.” But when asked about the type of food the sadhak should eat, Bhagavan emphatically

2 *Talks*, §170.

3 *Conscious Immortality*, p. 16.

4 *The Mountain Path*, Jan. 1971, p. 38.





recommended vegetarian food as “most conducive to the development of sattvic qualities of mind.”⁵

While Bhagavan never made demands on anyone to take up a vegetarian diet, when Devaraja Mudaliar raised the issue and asked Bhagavan if one could get the requisite nutrition through vegetarian food alone, Bhagavan was emphatic in convincing him that he could.⁶ Devaraja Mudaliar was not alone in making the transition to a vegetarian diet. Other devotees who had been accustomed to a non-vegetarian diet found that sitting at the feet of the Master had a cumulative effect on them and by and by they lost all interest in non-veg foods.

While some schools of vegetarianism include eggs in their diet, Bhagavan said that eating eggs, in addition to depriving beings of life, aggravates rajas and works against the practice of meditation.⁷ When a devotee asked Bhagavan if one could experience spiritual illumination while eating flesh foods, Bhagavan gave a qualified ‘yes’, but was quick to add that over time one would naturally gravitate toward ‘purer types of food’.⁸

Pungent and Non-Spicy Dishes

Other foods forbidden among the orthodox and religiously-minded people include onions and garlic. Bhagavan said they may “be good for the body but not [necessarily] for the mind. They may purify the blood and benefit the body but may rouse the passions and are not helpful for the purification of the mind (*manassudhi*).”⁹ But Bhagavan nuanced this position on other occasions.

When someone complained about pungent dishes in the Ashram (saying, “When sattvic food is essential for spiritual practice, how is it that the Ashram food is so heavily spiced?”), Bhagavan explained that as long as the ingredients were pure and prepared in a pure place and in the proper way, seasoning was a matter of taste and habit and did not make food less sattvic.¹⁰

Other devotees were simply not used to pungent foods and had difficulty digesting them. When Major Chadwick sat at the Ashram breakfast upon his arrival in 1935, he tasted chilli powder for the first time

along with the morning idlies. The experience was a memorable one as he found the chilli powder more like ‘gunpowder’. Bhagavan quickly came to the rescue and requested the kitchen prepare non-spicy dishes for Chadwick. He told Chinnaswami, “Chadwick has given up his all and come. We must look after him. Some food should be prepared for him without spices.”

So in 1935 on Chadwick’s behalf and for others who required it, Bhagavan initiated the serving of ghee and sugar along with the breakfast idlies in lieu of chilli powder, and at lunch, a special vegetable and soup (*dorai koottu* and *dorai rasam*) were offered in lieu of *sambar* and spicy *rasam*, a tradition maintained for nearly 80 years.¹¹

Bhagavan advocated rice, wheat, bread, fruit, milk, and vegetables as safe staples and urged the avoidance of an excessive use of chillies, salt and onions as well as of any food that induced drowsiness or excitement.¹²

Fasting of the Mind and the Best Diet of All

While Bhagavan felt guidelines for maintaining a sattvic diet were helpful in cultivating a mind suited to the spiritual life, such practices did not supersede the value of meditation and enquiry. He once said that the fasting of the mind was the most important practice of all. And while prudence regarding the quality and quantity of food taken can be an aid to sadhana, such disciplines should not occupy the sadhak unduly because diet is just one of the many human endeavours that require care in order to develop a vital and effective spiritual life.

The best diet of all, Bhagavan says, is accepting what ‘comes our way’ and ‘not craving that which is not available’.¹³ Put simply, ‘eat in moderate quantities’ and avoid preferences with respect to food. While yoga claims that yoga asanas and regimens of the body are necessary to defend against disease and make the physical body pure and healthy, Bhagavan assures us that interior silence and enquiry practised with one-pointed attention is ‘capable of devouring all the germs of disease wherever and whenever they arise’.¹⁴ Even ethical development, he says, will progress on its own with the practice of meditation and enquiry and ‘yama

11 Unpublished manuscript: *Ramana Periya Puranam*, V.Ganesan, p. 236.

12 *Talks*, §28.

13 *The Call Divine*, vol. 1, April 1953, p. 355.

14 *Crumbs from His Table*, Chapter 14, “Third Visit”.

5 *Be Still, It Is the Wind That Sings*, Arthur Osborne, 2000, p. 88.

6 *The Mountain Path*, October 1965, p. 218.

7 *The Mountain Path*, Aradhana 2001, p. 17.

8 *Conscious Immortality*, p. 60.

9 *The Call Divine*, vol. 1, April 1953, p. 355.

10 *Ramana Smriti*, 1980, p. 160.





and *niyama* will automatically come'.¹⁵ In other words, disorder of the body most often has its root in disordered understanding, in the confusion and ignorance born of egoic delusion. When this distortion is put right, bodily health rebounds of its own and settles in its natural condition. But as the inner work of enquiry progresses, Bhagavan urges us to assist the physical system in every way we can, not least of all in moderating food intake.¹⁶

Thirty-two Dishes

Of course, moderation is an ideal and in the day-to-day of daily life, practising moderation is not always possible as social pressures sometimes override it. This was often the case even for Bhagavan who frequently sacrificed his own wishes to accommodate the wishes of devotees.

Once a lady-devotee from Kerala insisted on cooking for the Ashram. After tremendous effort, she served an elaborate feast of thirty-two separate dishes. Bhagavan sat in silence as she served each item on his banana leaf. But upon initiating the meal, Bhagavan mixed up the thirty-two offerings into a single heap. He told her, "You have expended a lot of energy preparing all this food. Just collecting the materials must have been very time-consuming. One vegetable—which is enough to clean the stomach and keep one free of constipation—is enough. Why make all this? Then there is another trouble: if you prepare thirty-two dishes, the mind is always thinking, 'Shall I eat this one or that one?' So, the mind is also dissipated while eating. If there is one dish there is no trouble. We can eat it very simply. But meals like this set a bad example to people who have no food. Poor people will hear that we are serving luxurious meals and think to themselves, 'Here we are hungry but these people, who are supposed to be

¹⁵ In *Self-Enquiry*, Bhagavan says, "The experience of Self is possible only for the mind that has become subtle and unmoving as a result of prolonged meditation." (*Self-Enquiry*, §40)

¹⁶ *The Mountain Path*, October 1982, p. 259.

simple sadhus, are eating so many dishes.' Thoughts like these will cause unnecessary jealousy."¹⁷

A Single Dish and Three Fingers

For Bhagavan, moderation was not just a good idea but had been his way of life for the many decades since his coming to Tiruvannamalai. When he was staying at Gurumurtham, he only took a single cup of milk-mixture for the whole day.¹⁸ In the later years at Ramanasramam, Bhagavan often only took one idli for breakfast saying that for those who do no physical work, little is required. His lunch was only slightly more adequate, about a handful of food mixed into a ball.

"We used to eat only a single dish in the olden days. I have not given up that practice even now. While I was on the Hill many people used to bring rice, fruit and sweets. Whatever they brought, I used to eat only as much as could be lifted with three fingers. I used to eat some of whatever they brought so that the whole day's intake of food did not amount to a handful. That method of eating used to give me more than happiness. Nowadays they spread a leaf before me and serve several things on it. As I cannot waste food, I eat [it all but] feel heavy afterward."¹⁹

Excessive Vitamins

But it was not just food that well-intending devotees pushed on Bhagavan. Sometimes out of genuine concern for Bhagavan's health, they compelled him to take tonics, medicines and treatments that he didn't really need but in order to appease them, he acquiesced to their demands. Once in the late 1940s, Bhagavan called all the doctors in the Ashram and showed them a newspaper article which told of someone who had died as a result of excessive tonics and vitamin injections. The following day the same story appeared in another newspaper. Showing it to them again, he said, "For the

¹⁷ *Living by the Words of Bhagavan*, David Godman, p. 73.

¹⁸ *Crumbs from His Table*, Chapter 14, "Third Visit".

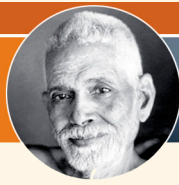
¹⁹ *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 7th April, 1947.

Announcement: Launching the Telugu Facebook Page

For the benefit of Telugu speaking devotees, Sri Ramanasramam is pleased to start a Facebook Page in Telugu. Here you will find information about important activities of Ramanasramam and the life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi in Telugu. Please support us by visiting and 'liking':

<<https://www.facebook.com/SriRamanaTelugu>>





last two years a lot of vitamins have been given to me, saying that it was all good for my body. Not satisfied, they tried to give injections as well. But see what has happened to this fellow!”²⁰

Cohen's Quiet Feast

Many devotees followed Bhagavan's example quite naturally and without the least effort. S.S. Cohen built a hut at Palakotthu in 1936 and lived on the meagre interest from his small savings. At Palakotthu, he lived a simple life, woke each morning, cooked some rice and vegetable, went to spend the morning with Bhagavan in the hall and then came home and ate his simple meal alone. And this life suited him well for he had never made a big fuss over luxurious meals. But one day when a wealthy devotee offered an elaborate bhiksha in the Ashram and Cohen was not invited, he went to his hut feeling a little downcast and found himself for the first time in his life pining for the food being shared by devotees with Sri Bhagavan in the Ashram dining hall.

“I never thought about food any time before or after that. But on that day, I was suffering. They were all eating such rich food there, and here I was eating this meagre meal.”

When Bhagavan passed by his hut later that afternoon, he asked Cohen about his lunch, something he had never done before. Cohen replied that he had eaten just a little rice and vegetable, to which Bhagavan replied, “Rice and vegetable? That's good. When I was in Virupaksha Cave, for days there would not be any food. On some days, somebody would bring some rice. I would add water to the cooked rice and then eat it without salt. You have got rice, vegetables, salt and curd on top of it.”

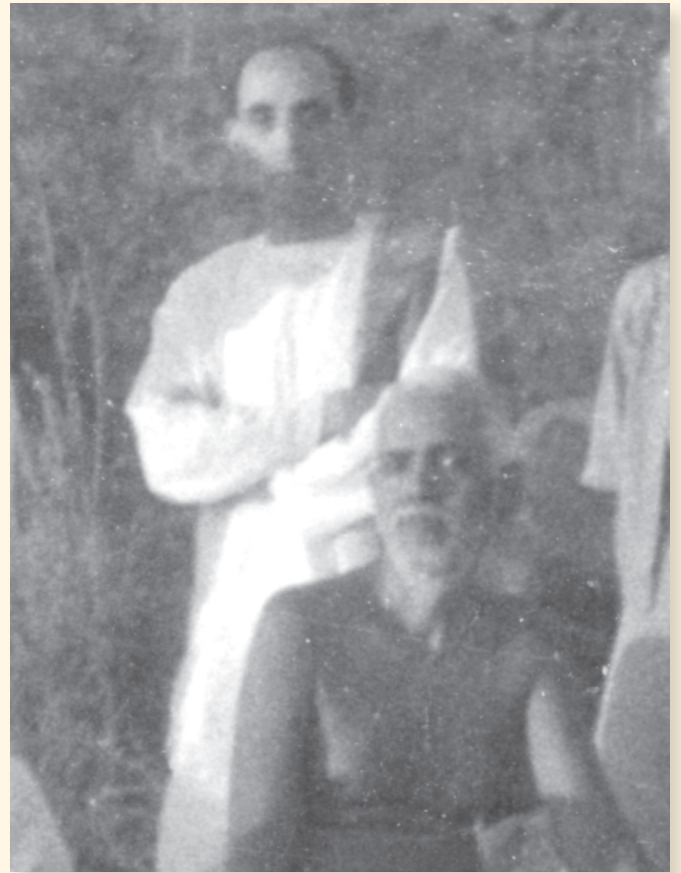
Cohen later commented, “After that day, not even once was I distracted by any thought of food.” He added, “That is the advantage when you stay with the master—every defect is rooted out once and for all. Living with a master is itself a spiritual sadhana.”²¹

Starving Padma

In the late 1940s, there were two Padmas in the Ashram. The one, Padma Venkataraman, was dubbed by Bhagavan ‘Starving Padma’ because of her

²⁰ *Ibid*, 20th January, 1946.

²¹ Unpublished manuscript: *Ramana Periya Puranam*, p. 260.



Bhagavan and Cohen on the Hill in the late 1930s

penchant for fasting and living only on milk. One day Padma got the urge to offer something to Bhagavan and asked the kitchen's advice about Bhagavan's likes and what she might offer. The kitchen staff dismissed her proposal, saying, “You yourself are starving. What can you offer to Bhagavan?” Undeterred Padma bought some palmyra fruit (*nongu*) and took it to the kitchen after lunchtime so they could give it to Bhagavan in the afternoon. Seeing her that evening, Bhagavan asked the attendant to fetch the fruit from under the sofa. Mindful that she was living only on milk, Bhagavan tenderly quoted a sloka from the Gita: *Yoga is not for one who eats too much or starves nor for the one who sleeps too much or too little*. He then gave her some of the fruit as his prasada. From that day onward, she started eating again. Padma later said, “I cannot say the ways in which Bhagavan has saved me and protected me through these years.”²²

²² “Reminiscences of Padma Venkataraman”, *Ramana, Ocean of Grace*, vol. 7, pp. 22-23.





On Surrender

One morning in the hall, an Andhra youth handed a letter to Bhagavan:

“Swamiji! They say that one can obtain everything if one takes refuge in God wholly and solely. Does it mean sitting still at one place and contemplating God entirely always, discarding all thoughts, including even about food which is essential for the sustenance of the body? Does it mean that when one gets ill, one should not think of medicine and treatment, but entrust one’s health or sickness exclusively to Providence? From the definition of *sthita prajna* given in Gita, ‘The man who sheds all longing and moves without concern, free from the sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’, attains peace.’ Therefore, should we devote ourselves exclusively to the contemplation of God, and accept food, water etc., only if they are available by God’s grace, without asking for them? Or does it mean that we should make a little effort? Bhagavan! Please explain the secret of this *saranagathi*.”

Bhagavan read the letter to those in the hall and said:

“Look, *ananya saranagathi* means to be without any attachment to thoughts, no doubt, but does it mean to discard thoughts even of food and water which are essential for the sustenance of the physical body? Should I eat only if I get anything by God’s direction and without my asking for it? Or should I make a little effort? [...] Suppose somebody puts [food] in our mouth, should we not swallow it at least? And is that not effort? If I become sick, should I take medicine or should I keep quiet leaving my health and sickness in the hands of God? Since hunger is like sickness, for the sickness called hunger, the medicine called food must be given. [...] One must take things as they come in accordance with one’s traditions and be free from the feeling that one is doing them oneself. The feeling that I am doing it is bondage. It is therefore necessary to find the method whereby

such a feeling can be overcome, instead of doubting as to whether medicine should be administered if one is sick or whether food should be taken if one is hungry, otherwise doubts will continue to come up and will never end.”²³

Licence for the Muktha

Finally, Bhagavan says, “Once you have attained illumination, it will make little difference what you eat. It is the early stages that are important. On a great fire, it is immaterial what fuel is heaped on it.”²⁴ Bhagavan adds that food restrictions are aids for such experience but after one gets established in truth, such restrictions drop away of their own. And so Bhagavan was not bound by the received wisdom regarding diet simply because he was not a sadhak but rather a fully realized being for whom food indiscretions could have little bearing. Yet he followed basic guidelines for diet if for no other reason than for the sake of his devotees. His *Self-Enquiry* ends with the following line: *I am not the body. I am Brahman which is manifest as the Self. In me, the plenary Reality, the world consisting of bodies is mere appearance like the blue of the sky. He who has realized the truth thus is a jivanmukta. Yet, so long as [...] the movement of mind has not ceased there will be no experience of bliss.*²⁵

The Yoga of Eating

One late morning in the hall, a man spoke up and began to tell Bhagavan that he had learned one type of yoga under one master, another type of yoga under another master and so on. Just then the Ashram dinner bell started to ring. Bhagavan looked at the man and said, “Now learn the yoga of eating under *this* master,” and took the man to have his dinner.²⁶ —

(to be continued)

23 *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 10th April, 1947.

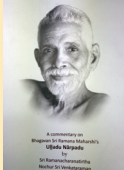
24 *Conscious Immortality*, p. 60.

25 *Self-Enquiry*, §40.

26 *Ramana Smrti*, p. 127.

SWĀTMASUKHI

(Bliss of the Self)



New Ashram Publications

Sri Ramanasramam Publications is happy to announce the release of Nochur Sri Venkataraman’s latest book titled *Swatmasukhi (Bliss of the Self): A Commentary on Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi’s Ulladu Narpadu*. Now available in the Ashram bookstall, this volume at 280 pp is an enlarged version of the Malayalam and Tamil editions and will be of interest to those who have enjoyed Nochur’s discourses over the years.





Concerned residents gathered on the Girivalam Road in July 2016

Improvements to the Girivalam Road

In 2015, the government announced a Rs 65-crore project to expand the Girivalam Road, excluding the built-up town areas where there was no room for expansion. Work commenced last summer, principally along Chengam Road and Kanji Road. The pedestrian pavement along Kanji Road was removed. Hundreds of old-growth avenue trees were marked for removal. A deep trench, intended as a drainage ditch, was dug along the Girivalam Path, immediately adjacent to the trees, on the right outer side of the existing avenue trees, starting at the Chengam Road junction.

In early July concerned citizens raised a cry as Highway Department contractors were about to remove the last remaining patch of natural forest. A peaceful human chain succeeded in earning a tenuous reprieve. A few hours later, members of the public were given a patient hearing in the Collector's chambers and the Highway Department was ordered to desist until further notice. Justice Dr. P. Jyothimani of the *National Green Tribunal*, Chennai Bench, issued an interim stay order and a two-member committee was formed, consisting of Hon.

Justice Mr. J. K. Sampath Kumar, retired High Court Judge, Madras, and Dr. T. Sekar, IFS (Retd), former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Chennai. At the end of September, the committee conducted a site inspection and held a public meeting at the Collectorate. Based on their findings, the *National Green Tribunal* passed an interim order on November 8, 2016, permitting 'conditional' work by the Highway Dept. but precluding further tree-cutting. The order directs that all shrines, temples and sites of worship are to be left intact as are all the trees along the road. Likewise, traditional tirthams and drainage channels are to be left in tact in the interest of protecting existing water catchment systems. All encroachments along the girivalam road, however, are to be removed. This includes the compound wall of Manikkavasagar Temple in Adi Annamalai, which is encroaching onto the public road. LED lights are to be erected along the pradakshina path and the left side of the road widened to accommodate pedestrians while the hill side of the road will be spared further widening. Work is already underway in anticipation of the upcoming Kartigai Deepam festival where 15 lakhs pilgrims are expected. But with the recent interim order, fears of a treeless girivalam path have abated, for the moment. —





Events in Tiruvannamalai: Pavala Kunru Mahakumbhabhishekam

After three days of *yagasala* pujas, all gathered at Pavala Kunru (Coral Hill) Temple on the morning of the 7th November when at 7.20am Mahakumbhabhishekam was celebrated atop the temple vimanam. Ashram President V.S. Ramanan watched the event from the Pavala Kunru Math below as he was unable to negotiate the two-hundred steps leading up to the top of the spur where Pavala Kunru is situated. Special daily pujas are being offered and devotees are requested to visit the newly renovated temple whose magnificent history leads all the way back to the legendary years when Parvati came to Tiruvannamalai to do her penance.

